

Coins

'O' mint mark stirs interest, but 'find' turns out to be fake

By Roger Boye

HERE ARE answers to more questions about coins and medals.

Q — I own a 1912 half-dollar with an "O" mint mark. When I showed my coin to two collectors, it caused quite a stir. What do I have? — C.J., Rockford.

A — The mint mark on your half-dollar is a fake because the New Orleans Mint (which used an "O" for identification) did not make coins after 1909. Quite possibly, a forger reshaped the "D" mint mark on a 1912-D half-dollar ("D" for Denver Mint) or used solder to form the "O." Experts can detect such handiwork with the proper equipment.

Q — I'd like to buy some of those rare silver dollars from the government, but I have no idea of how to go about it. Can you help? — D.D., Oak Park.

A — Write your name and address on a postcard and send it to Carson City Silver Dollars, San Francisco, Cal. 94170. Government workers plan to mail order forms several days before the first sale begins Feb. 8. As you may know, the almost one million coins to be sold were minted between 1878 and 1893 in Carson City, Nev.

Q — During the Bicentennial, I bought 40 silver medals from the Franklin Mint. A few months later, a coin dealer told me that my keepsakes were worth much less than the purchase price because, he said, "so few people collect that stuff." What's the going rate now? — T.D., Arlington Heights.

A — No one could appraise your collection without knowing what medals you own. However, the value of even the most common Franklin Mint silver medals has gone up substantially in the last year, thanks to the 200 per cent increase in the price of silver since November, 1978. In fact, for the first time, many silver medals made in the mid-1970s are now worth more than their issue prices.

Q — I understand that the United States Mint made silver coins during the Bicentennial. Is that true? Are the coins still in circulation? — E.E., Freeport.

A — The government produced silver quarters, halves, and dollar coins for sale to collectors in special three-piece sets. Bicentennial coins made for circulation did not contain silver, and they have no collector value today, unless in brilliant, uncirculated condition.

Q — Why are there still so many 1964 nickels in

Helmuth Conrad is on vacation. His stamp column will resume Dec. 23.

circulation? I get them in change nearly every day. — R.V., Chicago.

A — A record 2.8 billion nickels were made in 1964 to help relieve a coin shortage. That total is nearly triple the number of nickels minted in any other year, before or since.

Q — I'm told the rarest of all Lincoln cents is the 1909-S VDB. What does the "VDB" mean, and why do those letters make the coin valuable? A.R., Benton Harbor, Mich.

A — "VDB" stands for the initials of Victor D. Brenner, the man who designed the coin, which was first issued in 1909, the 100th anniversary of Lincoln's birth.

For the first few months of 1909, the Bureau of the Mint placed Brenner's initials on the tails side of the coin in relatively large letters. But the government quickly removed them from the coin because of citizen complaints.

In 1909, the San Francisco Mint produced about a half-million cents with the "VDB" and about 1.8 million cents without. (By comparison, more than 5.5 billion cents were made in Philadelphia last year.) Good-condition specimens of the 1909-S VDB cent sell for about \$150 today.

Incidentally, the "VDB" was restored to the heads side of the Lincoln cent starting in 1918. To find the tiny initials on a modern-day penny, use a magnifying glass and look along Lincoln's shoulder next to the rim.